

Sample Summary and Response Essay

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John F. Kennedy in 1947

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Name: ...

Date: ...

Student Number: ...

Word Count: 358 Words

(title) Why Did Some 20th Century American Presidents Keep Political Secrets?

(summary)

In his informative essay, "The Year that Changed Everything," Lance Morrow claims that 1948 should be considered a pivotal one in American history. The author says this year was one in which future Presidents Nixon, Kennedy, and Johnson went through "formative ordeals." He explains how each man's life was changed through decisions to reveal or conceal secrets. Nixon rose in politics through attempting to uncover communist activity in the Alger Hiss case. Kennedy prepared for the presidency by concealing his Addison's disease and allowing his family to cover up family sexual indiscretions. Johnson hid the questionable balloting in his congressional election. Morrow also mentions other provoking secrets of this era such as Kinsey's sex report, DDT, and Orwell's novel, 1984. He alludes to changes in world events by noting Gandhi's assassination, the Marshall Plan and the birth of the State of Israel. Suggestively, Morrow notes that in this year of secrets and the birth of television Americans questioned again whether they were a moral or immoral people.

(response)

I think that this essay is very thought-provoking even though I do not think Morrow clearly connects his examples to his thesis, and I think his explanations are weak throughout. I also think that his choice of 1948 is rather arbitrary for some of the examples. For instance, Kennedy found out about his illness in 1947 and concealed it until his death, so why focus on 1948? Nevertheless, I do think that Morrow convinces me that 1948 was a "seedbed" for a change in the way in which Americans viewed themselves, politicians and the political process. Our current adversarial politics and distrust in politicians do seem to be rooted back in the Vietnam era and Watergate, the era when these three Presidents were in charge of our country. Finally, I like the idea that at the core, Americans believe it is important to question: "Are we good people or bad people?" This article will be useful in my paper about the question, "What do Americans ultimately believe about themselves?" I will use this paper to discuss how this question was formulated and worked out in the last century.